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Loving the Self-Righteous

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Loving the Self-Righteous

Luke 15:25-32

Have your good deeds as a Christian ever made you feel that you were better than someone else?

Mine have.

Before I'd committed the sin referred to in the introduction to the first lesson, I'd been obedient to Christian rules and worked hard to be a good and productive person. Based on these behaviors, I considered myself valuable and right. I thought of myself as the hard-working, older brother. Like the Pharisees—the religious leaders of Jesus' time—I considered myself better than others. I had worked hard to be “good” by obeying solid, Bible-based rules, and I assumed I was deserving of God's favor, blessing and love. I looked at others who did not measure up to “church” standards and considered myself to be better than they.

Self-righteousness led me to think I was doing what God wanted and was therefore deserving of His blessing. Pride told me I was worthy of God's love.

However, I couldn't seem to receive the love pride told me I deserved. No matter how hard I tried to be “good,” I never felt I had actually done enough to please God and earn His love.

This was because, as Jesus points out in this parable, the Father's love doesn't work like that. As I came to realize later in life, God's love is completely unconditional. It is not based on human ideas of merit nor can it be earned by self-effort. Our Father freely gives His love to all people. In the New Covenant, Jesus shows us that we are of infinite worth to God. He loves us, not because of what we have done or failed to do, but simply and purely because it is His nature to love.

Read Luke 15:11-32 ([Parable of the Lost Son](#)).

Questions

Q. 1. Verse 28 says that the older brother was “angry.” Based on verses 25-27, what do you think he was angry about?

- Q. 2. In your own words, what did the older son say to His father in verse 29?
- Q. 3. Based on these words, how do you think the older brother felt he deserved to be treated? Why might he have felt this way?
- Q. 4. In what ways are you currently, or have you been in the past, like the hard-working, self-righteous older brother? Think deeply.
- Q. 5. In verse 30, what did the older brother say to his father about his younger brother? Why do you think he felt the need to point this out?
- Q. 6. In verse 28 and 31-32, how did the father respond to his older son?
- Q. 7. What do these words and actions tell you about the father's heart for his older son?
- Q. 8. Think of someone you know who is religious and self-righteous. How do you imagine our heavenly Father would interact with him/her?
- Q. 9. The parable doesn't tell us whether or not the older brother later chose to enter his father's house and join in the music and dancing. What do you think it would have taken for the older brother to decide to join in the celebration with his father and younger brother?
- Q. 10. God loves us unconditionally, regardless of our sin. Yet, He wants us to be righteous and good. How do we become truly good, not in the way the older brother thought he was, but like God designed us to be?
- Q. 11. What, if anything, of your own self-righteousness or self-sufficiency is resisting the unconditional love of God? Search your heart.
- Q. 12. What would it take to overcome that resistance and receive the Father's love for you?

Reflection

Earlier in Luke 15, Jesus had shared another parable. Read Luke 15:4-7 (below).

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15:4 “Which one of you, if he has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go look for the one that is lost until he finds it? 15:5 Then when he has found it, he places it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 15:6 Returning home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, telling them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.’ 15:7 I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to repent.

Read these verses again slowly.

Imagine that you are a little lost lamb. You have wandered away from the flock and night is coming. Unable to find your way home, you are lonely and afraid. Jesus notices that you are missing and sets out to find you. When He sees you, He runs to meet you. His face lights up in a smile. His eyes sparkle with joy. He has found you. He kneels on the ground in front of you. He lifts you to his strong shoulders...and carries you back to the flock.

Close your eyes for a moment and reflect on Jesus’ love and care for you.